SQUARE FOOT PLANTING: 4 tomatoes in a 4-foot by 4-foot block

SEED DEPTH: not applicable, transplant only

GERMINATION: not applicable

GROWTH

- In order to develop mature fruit, tomatoes must be transplanted in New England. If you grow your own transplants, start seeds indoors in early April, 6-8 weeks before the estimated last frost date.

- Be sure your transplants are hardened off before you set them out. To harden them off, place transplants outside in the warm sunshine for a few hours at a time, increasing the length of time each day over the course of a week or two, until you are able to leave them outside for a full day. Take transplants indoors overnight if temperatures are especially cold.

- Once your seedling or transplants have matured, plant them outside in late May to early June.

- Tomatoes are especially sun-loving and require consistently moist soil. When they receive inconsistent watering, tomatoes can develop blossom end rot, a calcium deficiency that causes the bottom of the tomato to turn black and decay.

- When watering, focus the water on the soil at the base of the plant; avoid splashing the leaves as this can encourage bacterial growth and leaf burn.

- Tomatoes benefit from staking or caging. This prevents the plant stem from snapping under its own weight.

- To ensure the biggest and best quality fruit, help direct your tomato plant’s energies into fewer stems by pinching back suckers as they begin to form in the corner of the plant’s main branches.

- Withholding water after mid-August will force the vines to ripen more fruit. Removing all young flower clusters after mid-September will help the remaining fruit ripen as well.